Representation at 84th Session of ILO

1337. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:
SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government had represented in the 84th Session of the International labour Organisation (ILO) held in Geneva in June, 2000;

(b) if so, the text of the statement made by the Indian representative in the session;

(c) whether in view of the mention in the said statement about the agricultural labour Government propose to place the comprehensive Bill for Agricultural workers before the Parliament during the ensuing session; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI MUNI LALL): (a) and (b) A Tripartite Delegation from India attended the 84th Session of the International labour Conference at Geneva from 30th May to 15th June, 2000. One of the Agenda items for discussion in the Conference was safety and health in agriculture which was considered by a separate Conference Committee. While considering the Report of the Committee on Safety and Health in Agriculture in the Plenary of the Conference, Minister of Labour, Government of Andhra Pradesh made a speech from the Indian Side. The text of the speech is given in the statement *(See* below).

(c) and (d) The Minister has, *inter alia*, made a statement to the effect that with a view to providing social protection and welfare measures for agriculture workers in India, the Government is engaged for some time now for the task of formulating a comprehensive law for them. The consultation process is yet to be completed with a consensus on the issue. The proposed Bill would be introduced as soon as a consensus is emerged in the matter.

Statement

Text of the speech made by Minister of Labour, Andhra Pradesh In 1LC in June, 2000.

I am grateful to the president for giving me this opportunity to lend the support of our country to the cause of health and safety of agricultural workers. As you may know, we have the largest population of agricultural workers in our country, approximately 150 million, and we are committed as a nation and as a Government to their welfare, health and safety. The initiative taken by the ILO

to formulate international instruments, that is a convention supplemented by a Recommendation, on health and safety for agricultural workers is both timely and commendable. Agricultural work activities range over a very large spectrum, from the most modern farms and plantations to those undertaken by small, medium-sized and marginal farmers, and even sharecroppers, squatters and indigenous people. The ILO has estimated that there are about 1.3 billion workers engaged in agricultural production worldwide, and there are about 170,000 fatal workplace casualties among such workers annually. This sector is also assessed as one of the three most accident-prone, along with mining and construction. Therefore, the need to provide protection and safety to such workers is self-evident. In developing countries, most of the holdings are small and medium-sized, and often the whole family is engaged in agricultural activities. Generally, such workers are poor, have little education, suffer from malnutrition, and are victims of chronic ill health. They also lack access to social and health care services. Many of them migrate from poor environmentaly and economically disadvantaged regions to seek job opportunities in more prosperous ones. Some of them migrate through contractors. All of them are exposed to various kinds of trauma, such as social exclusion and exploitation by ruthless employers. In India, we have about 150 million agricultural workers who generally belong to the poorest and the most disadvantaged strata of society. Their working and living conditions are covered under various labour laws such as the Workers' Compensation Act, 1923, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, the Plantations Labour Act, 1951, the Employment Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952, the Insecticides Act, 1968, the labour Contract Regulation and Abolition Act, 1970, the Equal Remunerations Act, 1976, the Interstate Migrant Workers Act, 1979, the Dangerous Missions Regulations Act, 1983 and the Child Labour Prohibition Abolition Act, 1983, etc.

Many of these laws have provisions for the health and safety of agricultural workers,but clearly much more needs to be done. With a view to providing social protection and welfare measures for agricultural workers in India, we have been engaged for some time now in the task of formulating a comprehensive law for them. We therefore welcome this step taken by the ILO. The provisions of the ILO instrument are sufficiently comprehensive, and when implemented will no doubt bring much relief to large numbers of workers worldwide, as indeed it will for the majority of workers of rural India. It is therefore a matter of satisfaction that the Committee on Safety and Health in Agriculture has concluded its first discussion and has come out with draft conclusions on the subject.

While recognizing that some of the standards may pose difficulties for some developing countries wishing to ratify such a convention, we still strongly support this proposal, which will do much to ensure a healthy and safe workplace in the agricultural sector.

Demand for New Ministry for Industrial Rehabilitation

1338. SHRI CM. IBRAHIM: Will die *Minister* of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received a representation from professional Workers' Trade Union Centre of India, Bangalore, requesting for setting up a new Ministry of Industrial Rehabilitation:

(b) if so, the grounds adduced for the demand: and

(c) the decision taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT (SHRI MUNI LALL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The basic demand contained in the representation is for creation of a new Ministry for administrative control of sick and loss making Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). The proposed new Ministry would rehabilitate those units which are revivable and effect closure where revival is not possible.
The new Ministry would address the problems of employees rendered jobless by absorbing them in other PSUs or by giving them a liberal compensation to ensure minimum subsistence till such time as they get alternate employment.

(c) The rehabilitation of sick PSUs is being effectively pursued by individual Ministries having administrative control over them. Budgetary allocations, wherever necessary, are being given directly to these Ministries for rehabilitation of viable PSUs. The Government has recently revised the Voluntary Retirement Scheme to take better care of workers rendered surplus as a result of closure/restructuring of PSUs. Hence, there is no immediate need perceived for creation of a new Ministry for this purpose.

Payment of Less Wages to Tendu Leaves Labourers

1339. SHRI R.S. GAVAI: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received any instruction from the International Labour Organisation regarding payment of less wages to the Lakhs of Adivasi labourers who collect 'tendu' leaves in the West Vidarbha;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.